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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001247

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: REVALIDATING THE SIGNATURES -- VOICES OF DISSENT

REF: CARACAS 00945

Classified By: Abelardo A. Arias, Political Counselor, for reasons 1.4
(B) and (D)

Summary

1. (C) The Coordinadora Democratica (CD) has pressed forward, negotiating with the National Electoral Council (CNE) a process for verifying petition signatures for a presidential recall referendum (CNE Director Jorge Rodriguez announced April 6 that the sides were close to agreement). There are dissident voices among the Chavez opponents, chief among them Proyecto Venezuela, which has taken a hard line against negotiations. Many CD party leaders privately object to pushing for an appeals process, viewing it as a means for Chavez to legitimize his rule with the opposition's tacit endorsement, though they insist, paradoxically, that a referendum is the only way to solve Venezuela's crisis. End Summary.

People Will Blame CD for Inevitable Reparo Failure

2. (C) Gente de Pueblo (GP) strategist and pollster Shelby Cabezas believes the appeals process (reparo) for the signatures presented to petition for a presidential recall referendum will fail and bring anyone endorsing the process down with it. Cabezas claimed his polling information indicates that the broad opposition umbrella group Coordinadora Democratica (CD) is losing popular support in lockstep with the "Chavez controlled" CNE. He claimed private polling data from mid-March showed 48 percent of the public had no faith in the CNE and 45 percent had no faith in the CD (down 20 percent since mid-February).

3. (C) Cabezas postulated that the CD is increasingly viewed as collaborating in a sham process that will result in the legitimization of the Chavez regime. Cabezas claimed negotiating for political objective, such as currying international support or obtaining favorable terms for regional elections, are lost on the "common people." He asserted that the public is losing confidence in CD leadership, and "when August comes and there is still no recall, people will be mad not at Chavez, but at the CD." Henrique Salas Romer, he told poloff, will appear sage-like in the aftermath and his Proyecto Venezuela (PV) party will reap the electoral rewards. Salas' support has risen 12 percent following his decision not to negotiate, according to Cabezas, who speculated that Alianza Bravo Pueblo, Primero Justicia, and small movements like GP will eventually abandon the reparo process.

Proyecto Venezuela: Reparo is a Trap

4. (C) Proyecto Venezuela Deputy Pedro Diaz Blum told poloff March 17 that PV's hard line against negotiating the appeals is risky, but he believes they will be justified when the process is revealed as a trap. He asserted that, based on figures released by the CNE March 2, the opposition would need a 70 percent turnout to trigger a recall referendum, "impossible in any electoral event." He criticized the OAS for continuing negotiations "after they admitted the process was fraudulent," legitimizing Chavez and delegitimizing themselves.

5. (C) Diaz Blum lambasted the CD for cutting PV out of previous negotiations and claimed it exists to promote Miranda Governor Enrique Mendoza's presidential aspirations. He asserted that criticism that PV's intransigence is hurting the CD's negotiating strength is overblown. Just because PV wants to distance itself from old, discredited political parties and does not endorse Mendoza, Diaz Blum explained, does not mean it will stop working with the CD to get rid of Chavez.

16. (C) National Assembly Deputy Leopoldo Martinez (Construyendo Pais) told poloff March 10 he did not want to endorse the appeals process, but he does not want to destroy the CD either, as he claimed Salas Romer was trying to do. Staying in negotiations may be the only game in town, Martinez explained, but it is not without a cost: the confidence of the people. The CD, he said, risks giving Chavez legitimacy if it blunders the appeals. Martinez also suspected CD leaders might be using the negotiations to angle for favorable conditions for regional elections.

17. (C) Martinez lamented that CD leaders fail to understand that Chavez wants the appeals process to "prove" the signatures are fakes and legitimize his rule. He claimed pressure on signers to recant by screening them for GOV employment and benefits is working (ref). As people increasing view the recall as futile, Martinez postulated, they may decide not to risk publicly demonstrating their opposition to Chavez. He said Chavistas are also hoping to invalidate some 400,000 approved signatures by pressuring GOV employees, job applicants, and beneficiaries.

Primer Justicia Divided Over Appeals Process

18. (C) National Assembly Deputy Carlos Ocariz told poloff April 1 that the appeals process has created ruptures in PJ between those who want to quit negotiating and those, like himself, who view continued negotiations as the only way to expose the GOV's "fraudulent CNE." Ocariz admitted that a failed appeals process might make negotiators "guilty by association" with the CNE, but walking away, he asserted, would only cede legitimacy to Chavez, who would claim the opposition rejected a reasonable, legal process. "This may be a trap we have to walk into."

Un Solo Pueblo: CD Unity Trumps Reparo Doubts

19. (C) Un Solo Pueblo Media Director Adriana Sanoja told poloff March 26 that although USP has little doubt the appeals process will fail, it is going along with negotiations. She said Salas Romer invited USP and other CD members to a meeting to gain support for a hard line against the appeals process. Sanoja claimed the effort backfired and helped unify them, albeit grudgingly, behind the negotiation strategy. "He wants to kill the CD, we can't be part of this," she said.

Comment

10. (C) We continue to promote negotiations to reach agreement on an appeals process with both opposition and GOV contacts, although we remain aware of the undercurrents opposed to doing so. While many opposition voices have condemned Salas Romer's refusal to negotiate, other voices in the CD correctly point out that embracing negotiation is also not without risks. Negotiation proponents in the CD will need to better explain their strategy, particularly to the "common people" that Cabezas accuses of not comprehending the finer points of negotiation, if they want to ensure the highest possible participation when, and if, an agreement to go forward is reached.

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